

Written Testimony in opposition to SB 1076

February 25, 2023

Dear Members of the Public Health Committee:

Thank you for serving Connecticut. I completed my residency training in Neurology at Massachusetts General Hospital in 2008, and have been working as a board certified neurologist in Connecticut since July 2008.

I am writing to ask that you oppose the legalization of assisted suicide, also referred to as “medical aid in dying,” in Connecticut. In my work as a clinician, I frequently see patients with degenerative neurologic illnesses, as I specialize in memory disorders and dementia. I am very concerned that legalizing assisted suicide will result in coercion, endangerment and the deaths of many Connecticut residents with disabilities, mental health challenges, and dementia.

While I have many reasons for being opposed to assisted dying/suicide, I would like to submit the following specific scenario of grave concern: I have seen countless numbers of individuals with a wrong diagnosis of Alzheimer’s or other forms of dementia. The wrong diagnosis may occur at the hands of a well-meaning physician or other health professional who does not have expertise in cognitive/memory disorders. It may alternatively occur in the setting of a frankly careless and hasty diagnosis. The wrong diagnosis may occur in individuals who perform poorly on neuropsychological testing because they have severe untreated anxiety or depression; or because they have a sub-optimally treated medical illness which affects cognitive function; or because they are on medications that affect cognitive function; or because they have untreated insomnia or obstructive sleep apnea; or because they actually have a “psychogenic” neurologic disorder...the list goes on and on. I have seen again countless times that when a very careful medical diagnostic approach is taken, and the underlying condition is correctly diagnosed and treated, there can be significant cognitive improvement; and these individuals ultimately do not meet criteria for dementia. These patients with a wrong diagnosis come to my clinic exasperated, devastated, in a very vulnerable state of mind. It would be unthinkable if the option of assisted dying/suicide made even one of these patients choose to die when they did not even truly have the disease. This would absolutely happen, and frequently, and would be unconscionable and unacceptable from a sociological and moral standpoint. There would be no true way to regulate this.

While the above was presented to demonstrate a very specific and real scenario in which there would be tragic deaths as a result of this bill, overall I oppose physician-assisted dying as being contrary to my oath and calling to heal, and not to hasten death.

Please protect vulnerable Connecticut citizens by voting "No" to SB 1076.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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